

COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.

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THE CASA AND THE DON

The Casa de Bandini/Cosmopolitan Hotel

Victor A. Walsh, District Historian

Old homes, like old acquaintances, bare witness to times gone by. No place perhaps better reflects this truism than the Casa de Bandini, which was built between 1827 and 1829 in old San Diego by Juan Bandini (1800-1859).

Married to Dolores Estudillo and, after her death, Refugio Argüello, the daughters of two influential Spanish Californio families, Bandini carved out an illustrious career as a politician, civic leader, and rancher. His American sons-in-law included Colonel Cave Coutts, a prominent San Diego rancher, and Abel Stearns, the wealthy Los Angeles trader and cattle baron.

According to Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo's 1829 drawing, the Bandini residence was originally U-shaped with two wings extending along present-day Juan and Calhoun

Streets out from the plaza. There were seven rooms, a zaguán or entrance hall, an inner and rear patio, outdoor kitchen, corral, and shed for rigging and harnessing horses. The rooms had thick adobe walls, ceilings of heavy muslin, and deep-set windows with shutters.

Alfred Robinson, the shipping agent for Bryant and Sturgis, described the stately whitewashed adobe in 1829 as a "mansion,...when completed, (will) surpass any other in the country." The home was the pride of this frontier outpost, a symbol of Bandini's elite status and love of fine things.

The casa's appearance was important to the Don for another very important reason: his love of family. "Bandini loves his family," says Cynthia Hernandez, who is translating his lengthy correspondence with son-in-law Stearns. "He really misses his daughters (Arcadia and Ysidora), and wants them to visit as often as they can."

Bandini set about refurbishing the home and grounds in the mid-1840s to entice his married daughters to visit him and Refugio on a more regular basis.

In May of 1846, he ordered 50 pieces of glass, all 8 x 10 inches, to install paned, wood-framed windows in the house.

The following year, he replanted the rear garden with "beautiful flowers." He also remodeled the patio, lining it with potted plants and replacing the rough cobblestone with clay brick. The hand-dug well was replaced with a deep brick-lined well, most likely built by a Mormon mason. Bandini also built a small wooden bathhouse on the patio for the comfort and privacy of his daughters when they visited.

An accomplished musician and dancer, Bandini often hosted parties on the veranda-enclosed patio. He hired guitarists and violinists and on one occasion in 1849, a contortionist — a young boy with flexible bones (soltura de huesos) — to entertain family and friends.

To Bandini, a man driven by an exacting sense of duty, caring for the house meant caring for the family. It was his testament to times gone by.

